

MITRASYA CHAKSHUSHA SAMIKSHAMAHE VEDA

(May we look at all with a friendly eye)

—Veda Niketan Publications

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IDEALS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VEDIC (HINDU) MARRIAGE

*Sugu suputrau sugrihau
taratho jivavushaso
vibhatih*

May both of you, endowed with energy, similar to that of the invigorating dawn and possessing sound character, procreate noble children, thereby swimming across the sea of married life by performing the duties thereof in a proper manner!

—Atharva Veda 14.2.43

Family life is happy only when the husband and wife are well educated, industrious and well versed in worldly affairs. —Swami Davananda

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Foreword

In Hinduism, sacraments play an important part in laying a good foundation for right living. Sacraments occupy a place of prominence among the rituals of all religions. The religious rites leave behind on our lives indelible impressions. A specific purpose is served by these ceremonies. It promotes determination and will-power. The daily practice of various religious duties moulds a person's attitude which becomes part of his personality and which prevents him from deviating from the path of rectitude.

Of the sixteen sacraments in Hinduism the Sacrament of Marriage is the most important one. Marriage influences the individuality of a person and enables him to become the most intimate associate of another. After marriage the individual goes forward in life as a couple. Marriage is the basis of the family and the family of the community.

It is necessary that we should know the real purpose of sacraments for it is only by understanding and appreciating their significance that we can derive real benefit from their observance and performance. Therefore the Veda Niketan has decided to publish separate tracts on the different sacraments. In placing before the public this tract on the "Significance of Marriage" it gives us great pleasure.

The author of this tract is the indefatigable and energetic Pandit Nardev Vedalankar. The translation into English has been undertaken by Mr. Jayant Govindji Desai. Mr. Sookraj Chotai has co-operated in editing the manuscript.

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To all the above-mentioned persons we extend the sincere gratitude of the Veda Niketan.

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Secretary
Veda Niketan,
Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, S. A.

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RELIGION AND LIFE

In order to make man's life noble and cultured the ideals of **Dharma** have been enunciated. Among the meanings of the word, "dharma", are: right conduct, right aspirations, ethical behaviour, religion and spiritual discipline. In all creation man's life is the highest. His high development lies in his leading life according to the rules of dharma. Without practising ethical and spiritual virtues he is an animal, not a man. The daily rounds of eating, drinking, sleeping and pleasure-seeking do not constitute the whole life of man.

To raise life above this animal level, to spiritualise it, by practising unselfish and virtuous acts, and to try and discover his innermost self within him by these and other means, are for man the main purposes for which he is born.

Man transcends his limitations, rises above the ideas that he is only the body and mind and nothing else, and so becomes free by realising his Atman (Soul). This knowledge of his Atman gives him freedom from all things and is the real reason for his living. The individual's lofty aspiration for freedom cannot be fulfilled if the whole society is not at one in believing that this is the highest possible ideal for man. That which raises both individual and society to the highest spiritual level is Dharma.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SACRAMENTS

In every act of life, in every situation, a religious outlook is essential. To cultivate this religious or spiritual outlook Hindu Dharma has established sixteen different sacraments. Even as the life of a person unfolds and sees changes from babyhood to adolescence, from youth to old age; so too, various rituals have been set up to sanctify these various stages in the individual's life-span.

A baby within a mother's womb grows not only in body and mind but also there is further development of his soul. For this reason the ancient Rishis of India have adopted spiritualizing measures even for babies who are in their embryonic stages.

In Sanskrit, the word **Sanskara** means "to create impressions on the mind". Through these sacraments, from the very beginning, good impressions can be imparted on the growing and delicate minds. From a very small age children are brought up in a proper religious environment. The second meaning of Sanskara is to purify and enculture.

Just as much as there is always a need to keep the body clean by bathing, there is also always the very real need to keep clean both mind and heart. There is the constant necessity to get rid of evil thoughts even as they arise in the mind. These sacraments are perpetual reminders that we should protect ourselves from the six enemies that lurk within us: lust, anger, greed, pride, attachment, and jealousy. There are different ceremonies, as prescribed by the Hindu religion, which correspond to different stages of growth in the life of a child. These are: **Naamkaran** (naming ceremony), **Annaprasan** (feeding ritual), **Mundan** (head-shaving), **Upnayana** (Sacred Thread), **Vedarambha** (scriptural education), and others. These are signposts on the road of life. By reading them an individual can get to know in which direction he should next proceed. They prevent him from taking the wrong road. In this way, these rituals serve as reminders to a person, in the various stages of his life, where he must travel, and what his goal is. Or, just as there are steps leading to a high place, these sacraments come as they do, one after another, acting as steps leading to the high place of spiritual freedom (moksha).

Thus these sixteen sacraments serve to check evil tendencies while at the same time they encourage the expression of the divine element within the individual self. They teach a person the true life of spirit.

THE IDEAL OF MARRIAGE

(a) Life's Fulfilment

Amongst the sixteen sacraments that of the marriage is the most important as it brings about a far-reaching

change in a person's life. Since a person lives a single life prior to marriage, he or she is concerned only with individual development. But with marriage performed transformation takes place. A partnership in life is undertaken and the union of the couple's spirits is achieved.

A woman's or a man's life is solitary by itself. At the time of sexual maturity they realise the vacuum that is in their unfulfilled separate lives. In both of them special qualities which belong to their separate natures begin to show themselves. That is why the average man or woman is unable to attain fulfilment by himself or herself; but only through marriage can they achieve it. In this way the qualities to which a woman is heir, like love, kindness, tenderness, affection and tolerance are beneficial to the husband while the wife in turn receives the benefits of the qualities generally found in men. These are valour, manliness, the spirit of adventure, foresightedness, and self-reliance.

This mutual union of man and wife gives security to their children and helps to make the family stable. That is why the Hindu scriptures have designated woman as the better half of man. They give mental aid to achieve perfection in life. They co-operate with each other to help remove certain defects in their natures. This is the ideal of marriage and fulfilment of life.

(b) Desire for Procreation

The second aim in marriage is to seek the continuity of the family lineage. God has implanted the desire for self-propagation in all living things in the universe. For this reason the Vedas, which are the sacred scriptures of Hindus and which are the standard for spiritual authority have included the debt to parents with the two debts — debt to God and debt to Rishi. Man becomes free of this debt to parents by procreating himself. Human beings nurture a natural desire to have children in their own likeness, either in appearance or mental endowment. The aim of marriage is therefore to satisfy this desire for progeny.

What man has in himself he wishes to give to society through his children. In like manner he wishes to fulfil through them those things he could not achieve in his own life for himself. Therefore marriage can be consider-

ed a natural unfoldment of Dharma in the rounds of birth and death. Marriage thus ensures continuity of the family line and so the birth of children constitutes a successful married life.

(c) Continence

The third main aim of marriage is to guide natural desires out of their promiscuous tendencies and to allow them to express themselves in a monogamous relationship: that is, in the union of husband and wife. Sexual desire is a natural instinct in all creatures. Human beings have linked it with religion. If an attempt is not made to restrain sexual passion or inordinate craving the human life is not different from animal life. And marriage is the religious channel through which man can satisfy his sexual desire, but at the same time religion warns against its excess. Sex cannot be suppressed all at once. Nor is it possible to gain mental peace by indulging in it freely. That is why Hindu religion has made "grihashthram" the householder's stage, the most important.

After undergoing the spiritual discipline of total sex purity, "Brahmacharya", till the age of adolescence, boys and girls are given the right to marry. Among the four main "Purusharthas" (dharma, artha, kama and moksha) which are the chief functions of man's existence (dharma is religion, artha is material wealth, kama is passion and moksha is spiritual freedom) our scriptures have given recognition to sex.

However, if people continue to over-indulge in sex enjoyment, they will not really become happy or satisfied. And yet, on the opposite extreme any attempt to stamp sex out altogether can lead to frustration; or worse, even in a violent outburst, in unguarded moments. It is only in saints or rishis that sex has been successfully controlled and used for higher spiritual purposes such as God-realisation.

Therefore Hindu Dharma allows for a creative expression of sex urge till a certain age, but afterwards Dharma counsels for its curbing and for freedom from it, when man is approaching old age. Keeping this in mind the Ancient Hindu Ashram has established a forest-stage (Vanaprasthashram) after the householder's stage and freedom (moksha) after sexual love (kama). Just as much

as there is urge towards sex gratification, there is also the very real urge in us towards wanting to realise oneness with the spirit within us: that is, a desire to overcome all earthly limitations to which all are heir. So it is important that sex thoughts should be transferred into love which is free from craving and so the role of marriage with this religious aim is considered vital. Real human happiness can come about only when control is achieved in matters of sex just as much as control is maintained over fire even though it is so essential to daily living. Married life without restraint is a life of hell. The whole society is benefited to the degree sex-sublimation is achieved. The duty falls squarely on the individual husband and wife to maintain spiritual standards as enjoined by Dharma.

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY AND ITS MEANING

1. Archan and arghyadan (welcome to the bridegroom)

As soon as the bridegroom's party arrives at the wedding place they are welcomed by the bride's parents and others. Comfortable seats are found for them. In her turn the bride then welcomes the groom in a special manner. In this reception ceremony the bride is introduced to her first duties as a wife. Till this the bride has lived at her parents' home where her responsibilities are few. But in this ceremony she is reminded of her duties not only to her husband but to all his relatives and elders. Among other things she is to show affection and respect to them. The bride offers the groom a seat by way of welcome. And she gives him water for washing his hands and face.

2. Madhuparka

In this ceremony the groom is given sour milk mixed with ghee and honey. This ceremony dates back to hundreds of years when rishis used it as a form of welcoming guests. This food is nutritious, is conducive to health and increases brain power. When the ceremony is performed the groom sprinkles the sour milk in all four directions saying: "This life is full of sweetness. Sweetness in the air, water, vegetation, grain, and in milk. I would like this sweetness to enter my life. May life's happenings be enriched and be full of harmony and love. May my life spread sweetness in all directions". One can notice the importance and generosity of this ceremonial.

3. Godan: Donation of a cow

In this ritual the bride's father presents the cow to his son-in-law. The cow is regarded as a symbol of motherhood in Hinduism. Just as a mother feeds her children with her milk, so the cow is also regarded as a mother who offers her sustaining milk to men and women, young and old, the healthy and unhealthy, to the strong and the weak, in short, to all.

The reverence for the cow is not to start a cow-worshipping cult but to seek her protection and propagation. The meaning of this ritual lies in the fact that the family may continue to receive the best food. This is why it has been the householders' task to protect the cow. Through the two ceremonies of "madhuparka" and "godan" the rishis have also shown what is wholesome food and wholesome drink. For the body and the brain there are no better products than cow's milk, sour milk, and butter. Cereals, fruits, honey and vegetables are also natural foods for human beings. Hence they alone are the correct diet for mankind. Other forms of diet make man passionate, lustful, prone to anger and vicious and so should never be eaten.

4. Kanya Grahana: Acceptance of the bride

In the fourth stage of the marriage ritual the bride's parents take her hand and place it on the groom's hand. And they say, "according to the tradition of the householders' life and the enactment of the virtuous way of life we offer our daughter to your care". And now by undergoing the ceremony of marriage the bridegroom accepts the bride's hand in marriage.

5. Presentation of gifts to bride

The groom next presents the bride with beautiful clothing and jewellery and welcomes her respectfully. This is the groom's first inkling of his life-long duty to his future wife.

6. Yajna (Sacred fire) and Prayer

The bride and her groom are now on the threshold of a new life. They now ask permission and blessings of their parents, teachers and elders and they proclaim that

they accept each other in marriage and they garland each other. Thereafter the sacred fire of marriage is lit and prayers to God is offered.

A sacred fire is lit in all important religious sacraments. Behind this act is the desire to sacrifice one's own things for the good of others. Fire is a source of light and heat. It dispels darkness. It symbolizes light and teaches man to banish the darkness of ignorance, delusion and poverty, and inspires him to establish happiness. Man seeks to avoid lethargy and indolence and to imbibe virtues such as alertness and creativeness.

The offerings put into the fire are not kept for itself, but fire readily disperses them in all directions. In this way yajna symbolizes sacrifice. Likewise a person is not meant to hoard riches for himself, but to make them accessible for the welfare of others as well. And he is also to render his service to others. The offerings in the yajna are for banishing diseases and vicious atmosphere. They spread purity and are spiritually cleansing elements.

Yajna is connected with devotion to God. Faith in God is the essence of religion. Devotion to God leads to spiritual strength. It makes man refined and pure. Man draws inspiration from God in all his noble and pure activities. Depending upon God to guide him, his faith in his tasks grows. He must dedicate all his efforts to God. In this performance of his tasks selfishness and pride will be gradually eliminated.

God is the creative power in the universe. He is All-powerful, All-knowing, and Omnipresent. God is one. We recognise Him in every expression of His energy. God's many names are nothing more than the powers that He has and through which He expresses Himself. This clearly indicates that there cannot be different gods and goddesses each of whom possesses separate powers. No clan or race can have its own gods. Nor can it be said that the different manifestations of God exist as separate entities. So it follows that prayers must be made to God alone.

Bride and groom chant Vedic mantras as prayer to God and with full faith in Him they become ready to fulfil their marriage vows and obligations.

7. Panigrahan: Hand clasping to take vows

Next the bride takes the groom's right hand in hers. With this gesture they repeat Vedic prayers and in the presence of God, fire, sages and elders they take sacred vows to live all their lives as man and wife. With these vows in mind they have to steer their boat across the stormy sea of life. The bride and groom then take the following marriage vows:

Bridegroom:

○ good-faced one, I take your hand for prosperity, good children and happiness. Live with me happily till old age. The Creator of the universe and the learned men and elders assembled here entrust you to my care for the fulfilment of conjugal life.

Bride:

○ brave one, I too accept your hand for our common welfare. May you live long with me in love, concord and understanding. From today let us surrender ourselves to each other and never be unkind or unloving to each other.

Bridegroom:

○ beloved one, having followed the path of righteousness I hold your hand. I now become your lord and you my mistress.

Bride:

○ my lord, I too, having lived an upright life, today become your wife. Together with you I would do my duties of married life faithfully.

Bridegroom:

○ beautiful one, the Sustainer of the universe has placed you in my charge for your maintenance. May you enjoy one hundred years of joyful life with me.

Bride:

○ my dear, with the grace of God I have accepted you as my lord today. In this world there shall be nothing dearer to me than you.

Bridegroom:

○ charming one, with knowledge received from learned men, we become today husband and wife in God's

creation. May the Creator of the universe bless us with good children.

Bride:

O courageous one, I too would increase our happiness by begetting brilliant children.

Bridegroom:

O sweet one, may the forces of nature — the sun, earth, air, water, electricity and fire — help us to produce noble children.

Bride:

O my lord, may we live in harmony with prana, apana, aushadi, vanaspati and soma to procreate worthy children.

Bridegroom:

O dearest one, I have received you in this beautiful form for the continuation of my dynasty. I shall always be faithful in love to you. I shall not do any immoral act. I promise to lead a pure married life.

Bride:

O my dear, I too will remain true and faithful to you. I promise to perform my household duties as required by Dharma.

8. Shilarohan: Stepping on the stone

This ceremony follows the vows taken above. Here the bride places her foot on a stone. The meaning of this gesture is that in life the married couple may be visited by periods of joy and sorrow. Sometimes life brings riches, at other times poverty. In spite of difficult circumstances man and wife must remain steadfast together and true to each other. Just as a rock remains unshaken under any kind of storm, so bride and groom resolve to live according to rules of Dharma through all the vicissitudes of life.

9. Lajahom: Barley offering into the sacred fire

The bride and groom join the palms of their hands together. Into them the bride's mother and brother place some barley which they offer into the fire. At this moment they say: "God has given us food, money and all life's necessities. We receive this as a special God-given gift

for the maintenance of our lives. We shall use it for the welfare of the whole society as well". This vow points out that a householder's true duty is to rise above selfishness and consider the welfare of others as well, as his responsibility is great and the entire social system operates through his initiative. He satisfies the needs of all in society.

10. Pradakshina (mangal fera): Encircling the sacred fire

With the "Lajahom" offerings the bride and her groom encircle the yajna four times. And they receive a foretaste of the true Dharma of the married stage. The bride says: "I have just left my father's family life. But I will never abandon the family life of my husband. Through God's grace may my husband live a long life. In like manner may my newly-adopted family's every member never lack any material need. Both of us will live a life of love and understanding".

During this sacrament the groom's brother walks with a pitcher of water, behind the bride and groom. This is done for protection and mutual co-operation. At the same time he makes the fire feel as cool and tranquil as the water, the significance being that there exists as a potentiality the embers of a hidden fire of family bitterness, cleavage and that this potential fire should not be made to burst into flames but to remain as cool as the pure water in the pitcher, through the means of love and understanding.

11. Saptapadi and Granthi-Bandhan: Taking 7 steps and tying the matrimonial knot

The bride and groom now prepare to walk the "7 steps" — a ceremonial in which they take 7 steps. Also, two ends of their garments are tied together. Till this time they have lived in separate families. But now they become united by holy matrimony. United, they enter wedded life. From this point onwards, they must attempt to prove that they are one in thought, sympathy and spirit. In this way the wife becomes the better half of man or one who stays together with the husband in religious sacraments.

Both husband and wife take a vow to uphold the monogamous ideal. At a mature age and of their own accord

they have tied the marriage knot, with the full approval of their elders and learned people. To remain true to each other till the end of life is really the true meaning of marriage.

During this "7 step" ceremony the couple takes steps one by one, chanting a mantra at each step in order to become happily married. At the same time they pray to God, the Protector of all, for the following 7 necessities:

It is only by the acquisition and knowledge of these necessities that married life can be organised, and the couple be made to live happily.

The first step is taken with the desire for food. Food is the prime necessity of all living things. Life itself depends upon food.

The second step is a wish for strength. Life's "ups and downs" can be faced only through strength and courage.

The third step is for wealth and prosperity: Money is a medium of exchange with which all dealings are carried on in society. For the livelihood of the family, the raising of children, and for fulfilling all social obligations, money is all important. It is important that both man and woman should consider their ability to earn money in an honest way before entering into marriage.

The fourth step signifies wisdom and knowledge. If the parents had been brought up properly and are themselves morally sound individuals, then their offspring will likewise take after them.

The couple takes the fifth step with a prayer to be blessed with offspring. This is in order to fulfil the 'debt to parents'.

With the full benefits of the first 4 steps granted, whatever children are born to them will be of strong character. Of this there is no doubt.

The sixth step is for perfect health. It is important to safeguard the body by considering seasonal changes. It is the healthy individual alone who can aspire for real happiness.

The seventh step is taken with the view to friendship. This step is for fond regard and love that must exist between them if marriage is to endure happily. It is love

that exists between equals, as among true friends. Husband and wife must capture each other's hearts. With trust, tolerance and magnanimity between the two, true love can be cultivated.

At the same time the couple should extend their love, respect and consideration to their elders. They must also live in friendship with neighbours and the rest of society. This world is held together by love and co-operation, and the couple must thoroughly understand the seventh step.

12. Jalsinchan: Sprinkling of water

Next the groom's brother sprinkles water on the heads of the bride and groom. Water is the symbol of purity and sanctity. It has a cooling effect on heat. That the householders' lives remain pure, sacred and peaceful, is the significance of this rite.

13. Suryadarshan: Beholding the Sun

The bride and bridegroom behold the sun in order to be blessed with health and a creative life of a hundred years. Proper use of natural elements can bestow happiness to man.

14. Dhruva-darshan: Beholding the Polestar

By gazing at the firm and bold stars of Dhruva and Arundhati in the sky the bride and groom resolve to remain unshaken and steadfast in a religious way as married entities. (During the occasion of marriage by night the couple may look at the imagined sun and during the day at the imagined star of Dhruva).

15. Purnahuti and Ashirvad (Completion of Yajna)

Finally the bride and groom perform the end part of the yajna. After this learned people, elders, and friends stand up to bless the couple with longevity of a hundred years, good fortune and happiness. This final ceremony formally establishes for the couple the married state.

These, then, are briefly some of the broad principles and significance of the Hindu marriage ceremony which impresses on the minds of the couple their duties to each other, their community and the world at large. It takes into account all aspects of the nature of man and fuses them into a religious whole.



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